

Raise the Curtains

Story: Raise the Curtains

Storylink: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/35126137>

Category: Re:ゼロから始める異世界生活 | Re:Zero Starting Life in Another World
(Anime)

Genre: F/M

Author: Zeivira

Authorlink: <https://archiveofourown.org/users/Zeivira>

Last updated: 11/14/2021

Words: 2819

Rating: Mature

Status: Complete

Content: Chapter 1 to 1 of 1 chapters

Source: ArchiveOfOurOwn.org

Summary: Subaru Natsuki was born a woman. It's only logical her Authority is a bit different, too.

Chapter 1: Raise the Curtains

When Reinhard arrives to the late city of Pristella, he is met by ashes. Most buildings were destroyed, if not partially burnt down: the Sword Saint has proven to everyone, once again, how slow, useless, and unworthy of his title he is.

The odor of corpses is barely recognizable between the smoke—but he smells them, he always does. Their blood, their sweat. Just like he can hear the people sobbing under the rubble of their former houses, children and adults alike.

He should have arrived at Pristella hours before, he should have—*done something*. Anything.

A night ago, he had been informed that the city of Picoutatte had been attacked and a new lead on the infamous Archbishop of Sloth had been found. The lead had been a red herring—nothing but a trick to make sure he remained far away from Pristella when the other archbishops invaded.

Reinhard should have known better. *Any other Sword Saint would have known better.*

After Lady Emilia was killed by the Bowel Hunter at the Capital and the final Royal Candidate was never found, Reinhard should have noticed that the Witch's Cult was after the Dragon Maidens. *All of them, not just Lady Emilia.* He should have been by their side at all times. He should have never trusted Julius and the rest of the knights to take care of them, because, as capable as they are, they are humans, mortals—unlike him.

"Reinhard!" a knight calls for him as soon as the people at the garrison take notice of his presence in the city. The man looks young, tired, and hurt, but for some reason Reinhard cannot fathom, he seems happy to see him. Just a glance is enough for Reinhard to understand that the knight has been working nonstop ever since the attack occurred. He is a better knight than Reinhard will ever be—he probably saved more lives than Reinhard will ever save.

His fellow knight fills him in with everything he needs to know. The city was attacked by the archbishops of Lust, Wrath, Greed, and Gluttony. Lady Priscilla was killed, and her knight is nowhere to be found—just like Julius and Lady Anastasia.

Julius and Lady Anastasia, Reinhard feels his heart stop. If Lady Priscilla is dead, so is half the future of his kingdom. There could be no *Royal Election* if all the candidates were dead. There could be no *Pact with the Dragon* if they fail to keep their part of the bargain.

Reinhard gives him a curt nod and thanks the knight for his hard work. The man gifts him a nervous smile and starts talking again, "Sir Julius is with her, so we believe she might be safe, hiding alongside him. The captain already ordered most of the forces to search for them, anyway," he explains. Reinhard nods absentmindedly "I—we—the knights, I mean—are glad you are finally here. The cultists won't attack as long as you stay in the city. So—thanks?" he says, unsure but grateful. The lack of wind means he believes he is saying the truth, even if Reinhard knows better. "I'm sorry—we are sorry—we weren't able to do more to protect the people," he finishes, and the Sword Saint doesn't answer.

The knight's tone implies he doesn't blame Reinhard, but he can see the rest of the knights, hear what they whisper behind his back. He knows not everyone agrees with him. He knows *he* doesn't agree with him.

Reinhard thanks him and proceeds to search the entire city to the ground. He needs to find Anastasia Hoshin, because Julius is with her and there is simply no chance Julius is dead. He is, surely—safe and sound with Lady Anastasia and some members of the Iron Fang. Reinhard couldn't have failed his kingdom so much that even the last

remaining Candidate is dead. He couldn't have failed his friends so much that Julius, too, is dead. Not after Ferris killed himself, a week after the second expedition against the White Whale took place.

He finds his answer inside an alley, only a few streets away from the main castle. Lady Anastasia's corpse lies on the floor, cold and very much dead.

He stares at it as he feels the entire world shift around him. Pain and agony fill his heart as he walks towards the unmoving lady on the ground. The last Royal Candidate perished while he was running towards Pristella. *He was too late.*

He doesn't fall to his knees, but he can barely sense the floor under his feet as he kneels. He doesn't even notice the woman standing next to the source of his grief until she gives a *loud* and deep breath. Reinhard doesn't look at her, still too busy processing how in little more than ten years, he managed to destroy the kingdom his family worked so hard to protect—the kingdom his grandmother cherished so much.

He was too incompetent to save the Royal Family. Too slow to stop the Beast of the End from freezing hundreds of innocents at the Capital. Too late to defend Pristella from the Archbishops. Too useless to even protect a single Royal Candidate.

The woman is still standing by his side when he finally gathers enough energy to move. If she was the only witness of Anastasia's death, she—*probably, maybe, hopefully*—could tell him where Julius is.

But the young lady's voice breaks him out of his thoughts before he can utter a single word, "You don't have to worry about Sir Julius, I told Archbishop Lye to keep him alive. He is under the marketplace, in one of the city's secret tunnels," she informs him, almost as if reading his mind, "I'm sure you will have no problem finding it."

And just like that, the world focuses again. He rests his hand on his sword's pommel and turns to stare at the strange woman, only meters away from him. Black haired with slanted eyes—beautiful in an eccentric way, yet for some reason he cannot understand, oddly familiar. She isn't Lugunican, and her foreign traits make her even more attractive.

With a black dress and high heels, she doesn't look any more dangerous than Ferris used to when wearing his casual clothes. If it weren't for the crystals on her neck, he could have confused her with a civilian. He didn't know many Spirits Users other than Julius.

But Reinhard doesn't pay her beauty any mind—it's her words what trouble the Sword Saint the most. As glad as he is to be told Julius is alive, he—"... Archbishop Lye?" he asks, voice dull. Because he has been told all archbishops had already left the city, and the young lady in front of him doesn't look like any of the Witch Cultists the knights described.

She nods, eyes downcast. "You probably know him as Gluttony. A bit wild—but if you ask him politely enough, he follows orders just fine," she continues. "He is much friendlier than he looks," she adds, almost as an afterthought.

Her tone is monotonous and flat—Reinhard clenches his fist as he hears the woman describe the person who killed many of his colleagues. His Sword hasn't recognized her as his equal, but he knows better than to underestimate someone who worships the Witch. Especially if her position was important enough she could order the other archbishops around. "Who are you?" He finally asks. He needs to a title to match her face. Something to tell him whether she is a friend or a foe.

"—the Witch Cult's Archbishop of Envy, Natsuki Subaru."

The wind doesn't blow. A truth.

Envy. Reinhard's grip on his sword gets stronger— If it were any less special, he is sure it would have broken already. There was an Archbishop of Envy. And it was in Pristella. The Archbishop of Envy had killed—

"Did you kill Anastasia Hoshin...?" he asks while facing the witch cultist. He shouldn't be interrogating an archbishop deep into an alley, all alone, he should be evacuating the city and taking the woman far away from the innocent civilians around them.

"Yes," she admits easily, voice and eyes still as empty as a carcass.

Another truth. Under a different situation, her tone, manners, and the lack of feelings his Divine Protection of Empathy perceived would have alarmed the legendary knight. "I see," Reinhard's heart beats wildly on his chest. How could everything go so wrong in a single year? Could what be left of the city of Pristella bear the fight between the Sword Saint and the Archbishop of Envy? He doesn't think so. "What does the Witch Cult want with Julius Juukulius?"

"So many questions..." she gives a melodramatic sigh and softly taps her right cheek, her fringe hides one of her eyes as she looks at the sky in fake wonder. "The Witch Cult has no interest in the *Greatest Knight of the Royal Army*. To keep him alive was just a personal request of mine," she finishes, once again staring straight at him.

No wind.

He doesn't appreciate how mockingly she pronounced Julius' title, but that's the least worrying part of her speech. A joke, an insult was to be expected, but not her confession. For a moment, the hold on his sword falters. "Why?" he asks—begs for a good explanation—reason, as he stands up. Why would anyone that wanted the Royal Candidates dead want Julius alive?

She hesitates before answering—or so Reinhard thinks, "He is an asshole and a pompous git, but he is a good person, even if I hate him," she finishes, lips a thin line.

Lie. Truth. Truth. Lie. The wind tells him everything except what he actually needs to know. "I don't understand," Reinhard grudgingly admits. And he really doesn't. "Have you ever even met him?"

She forces a frown, "not really."

Some wind—a partial truth.

He doesn't know how to feel about the realization that Julius unintentionally met an archbishop and somehow made enough of a good impression that she didn't want to kill him. He considers, once again, that Julius would have been an excellent Sword Saint. If his friend had a hundred divine protections instead of one, Reinhard is sure he would have been able to convince the strange witch cultist to extend her mercy towards everyone, not just him.

"... Please don't blame yourself for this, I planned it all in a way not even Sir Reinhard could make it in time..." she murmurs, and the only reason he was able to hear her was because of his blessings. She abruptly gives him a humorless laugh: it makes him believe she didn't mean to say the former sentence out loud. "Why am I even telling you this? This wasn't what I was supposed to say—I—*Whatever*, it's not like it changes anything. They are still dead, yes," she nods as she gazes at Anastasia's stiff form on the floor, only meters away from her. "All dead, the five."

Even with the lack of wind, it takes him an entire set of seconds to understand that *the Archbishop of Envy was trying to comfort him*. Her words don't match her actions, just like another unwilling enemy of his he had to fight a year ago, at the Capital.

“—The five?” he asks, finally registering her last words.

“—The five,” she repeats, eyes cold.

“I...” The fifth candidate, gone before he could even find her. The familiar and unbearable feeling of loss takes hold of his heart once again. “...What was her name?”

She remains silent, clearly averse to talk.

He takes a step toward her, ready to finish their chat, only to stop moving a moment later—there is a short-lived, although severe, feeling of guilt crushing his chest. He takes two more steps forward. Now only centimeters away from her, he can even feel the heat of her breath caressing his face. Their closeness barely seems to make the archbishop uncomfortable. “Why? Why kill all of them? What did they do to—”

A sign of life, a spark of ire—and maybe something else—finally appears on her eyes, “It couldn’t be helped, I needed the candidates gone,” she reluctantly admits, grinding her teeth.

“—*Why?*” he asks yet again. If he were to find out the answer, perhaps—

She takes her time to reply, “I had to test something.”

A test. Reinhard has never been one for violence, but it takes all his will to resist the temptation of snapping the archbishop’s neck. “All of these—massacres, death—just for a *test*,” he breathes out, blue eyes filled with disbelief.

“I had to see if it broke it.”

Reinhard stiffens as he activates all his Divine Protections at the same time. *No, no*, the woman couldn’t have broken Satella out of her seal. He would have realized something like that immediately after it happened.

The Sword Saint takes a deep breath and momentary closes his eyes—the birds around him still sing, Od Laguna’s sky is pure blue, tens of millions of people living, laughing, aging: the world isn’t being consumed just yet—of course, they would only attempt to break The Witch’s seal *after* Lugunica’s pact with the Divine Dragon was officially broken.

“You have made a grave mistake today,” he informs her, “Do you really think The Witch of Envy will spare you?” he asks his opponent before he can stop himself.

Her entire body contracts into a small, little thing, as her eyes widen and she takes a step back, turning all of Reinhard’s surroundings into waves of *fear* and *shock*—just like cursed white snow did, back then. “*You can’t know.* You never did—you—how do you...?”

“If you break her out of her seal—it won’t matter who you are. She won’t spare you,” he explains, firmly. Maybe it’s because she spared Julius and tried to comfort him. Or maybe it could just be that the crushing feelings of guilt and panic on his core are beginning to drown him, but truth is he wants to make her understand her mistake.

“*What—?* Ah—ahhhhh, you mean—right,” she muses, and for the first time, the bitter smile on her face looks real. “Why would—? I’m not planning to break the seal. I *won’t* break that seal.”

He doesn’t care that he *still* doesn’t know what she broke or attempted to break, he is overjoyed to be told that the Witch remains sealed. He gives a deep breath. “What are you breaking, then?”

She glares harder, unimpressed by his objectively bad interrogation skills. “I’ll raise you a better question,” she takes another step back. “We have been talking for far too long already. Why haven’t you tried to kill me yet, Reinhard?”

And while Reinhard inwardly agrees, he should have killed her the moment she introduced herself—an archbishop is too dangerous to be kept alive—it feels like they

haven't talked nearly enough. He is unsure why, but there is something off about their entire conversation, her feelings, her words, and how familiar his name sounded when she called him just mom—

He opens his mouth to speak, but no words come out of it.

Reinhard studies her once again—her hollow eyes, her trembling smirk. In a crossroad, the redhead asks a single question. "Have we met before?"

Her eyes widen, and the intense feeling of guilt slams his chest yet again.

She doesn't answer, instead just shakily raises her hand towards the main crystal hanging from her neck. With narrowed eyes she ultimately speaks, "ask Od Laguna for that answer, because I won't be giving it to you, *Hero*. My job here is done, either way."

"I see," he answers—and wind blows because he truly doesn't. "I'm sorry," he tells her, and this time nothing happens, because he genuinely is.

She at very least, appears to understand his feelings. "I tried everything but—there was no other option. Nothing else seems to work," well-hidden anger laces her tone, if it's towards Reinhard or herself, he doesn't know. The one thing he is sure of, is that when she closes her eyes, she doesn't intend to open them ever again, "and I'm sorry, too," she concedes.

When Reinhard moves, an entire minute after she finished talking, her rage evaporates from the air around him.

...

.....

.....

DEAD END

NEW ALTERNATIVE ENDING DISCOVERED

"VAINGLORY IF"

BECOME AN ARCHBISHOP OF SIN AND ENSURE NO CANDIDATE LIVES TO BEAR THE CROWN

...NEW GAME LOADING...

.....

...

Subaru Natsuki drops her school bag as she meets the sight of Lugunica's Capital. A green-haired man scowls at her, "are you going to buy an appa or not?"

—Meanwhile Reinhard stares at the archbishop's corpse with dull, vacant eyes. The heart-crushing guilt inside his chest has only gotten stronger.